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ABSTRACT

After observing the lack of parental involvement in children's educational development among clients, an instructor determined to learn if offering incentives to parents to work with their child/children would increase parental involvement. Working in an adult basic education/General Educational Development parental assistance program with services given through home visits, the instructor chose nine families to complete a checklist targeting their involvement with their children at home and at school. The instructor also collected field notes of observations made during home visits concerning parents' attitudes toward their child's/children's education. Results of this checklist and field note observations were used to determine the baseline for each family. The instructor offered an incentive to parents if a total of seven selected parent-child activities were completed on subsequent visits. The instructor explained to these families that they would be eligible to attend a group picnic (the incentive) upon the successful completion of these activity-assignments. The results of offering an incentive to parents to be a part of this research appeared to be positive from the very beginning of the project. Six of the seven families completed the seven activities. Appended are the 3 forms used in the study. (Author/YLB)

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BUREAU OF ADULT BASIC & LITERACY EDUCATION

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PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Special Project

A Learning From Practice Project

Action Research Monograph

ED 440 221

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Will Parental Incentives Increase Parental Involvement?

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PRODUCT

"Pennsylvania Action Research Network:
Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers"

Project Number 099-99-9010
July 1998-June 1999

Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940"s. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

After observing the lack of parental involvement in children's educational development among my clients, I set out to learn if offering incentives to parents to work with their child/children would increase parental involvement. Working in an ABE/GED parental assistance program with services given through home-visits, I chose nine families to complete a checklist targeting their involvement with their children at home and at school. I also collected field notes of observations I had made during home-visits concerning parents' attitudes toward their child/children education. The results of this checklist and my field note observations were used to determine my baseline for each family. I then offered an incentive to these parents if a total of seven selected parent-child activities I planned to give them were completed on subsequent visits. I explained to these families that they would be eligible to attend a group picnic, the incentive, upon the successful completion of these activity-assignments. The results of offering an incentive to parents to be a participant in this research appeared to be positive from the very beginning of the project.

II. PROBLEM

I see the lack of parental involvement among my clients stemming from a variety of sources. I work as a parent-educator in a rural area where my clientele is isolated from immediate academic and cultural resources. Most of these families must travel at least 15 miles to access even a public library. These families are not new to rural life as generations of their families have lived there before them and they are content with isolation but not aware of its possible harmful effects on their children's lives.

Because I offer my services of parenting, early childhood activities, and ABE/GED in the clients' home, I am able to assess the educational ability of these parents, many of whom function at a low level. I believe they feel inadequate as teachers and don't think they possess the skills necessary to increase their child/children's educational development at home. They view the school as the only source of education and socialization their child/children need.

I also believe that a parent's ignorance or denial of his child's delays has contributed to this issue of a noninvolvement. Some parents simply do not "see" that the child is behind and that he could improve his skills and development with the help of the parent working with him at home

before he enters kindergarten. One mother of a 5-year-old boy thought he shouldn't have to be able to identify letters of the alphabet until he was six years old because the child's cousin is six and can't identify all the letters. I gave appropriate materials to this mother to work with her son on a daily basis to introduce the letters of the alphabet to him, but future visits proved that this did not occur. The mother didn't believe that her son was delayed even though he was unable to recognize even two letters..

As a parent-educator, one of my most important goals is to increase parental involvement within our families. Therefore, I feel that any intervention with positive results in this area would be an important factor in proving our parental assistance program successful. The ultimate success of our program, however, lies in helping parents be aware of their role as their child's first and most important teacher and encouraging them to fulfill that roll in order to have children who are successful in school and throughout their lives.

III. PLANNING

After observing so many of my parents who detach themselves from their child/children's educational development, I chose to intervene by having nine consenting families agree to complete parent-child activities that I would give them on each visit for a period of three months. Each of the nine families was to be given seven different activity assignments over this 3-month period. I had planned to see each family twice a month and my time frame allowed one canceled visit by either my client or me. Since I do not usually have a high number of cancellations among my clients and because I was certain that some families would not stay through the end of the project, I felt that this time-frame was sufficient to complete my project with reliable results.

The activities I chose for this project were fairly easy to assure that they could be completed by the next scheduled visit. They were designed to demonstrate to me that both the parent and the child contributed to their completion, and I used this cooperative input of parent and child as one criterion for the success completion of each assignment.

Of course, the most important criterion for measuring success in this project was to observe, during home-visits, if and how the relationship between the parent and child had changed as a result of spending quality time together. I watched to see if the parent revealed enthusiasm for working with his child or if there was indifference to the child but revealed enthusiasm for merely

completing the assignment in order to win the incentive of going to the picnic.

Some of the constraints I encountered in preparing this research were in designing the parent-child activities. I realized I could not give all the families the same assignments for they had to be age-related to the child involved, and I had to gear them to the functioning level as well as the baseline of the parent. Activities that included a lot of reading could not be given to two of the families because the parents had low reading skills. I also wanted to design projects that would be "fun" to do for both parent and child, and with each activity I suggested to the parent that he "direct" the activity while the child does the cutting, gluing, drawing, etc.

Along with designing appropriate activities for each family, other problems began to develop. About six weeks into the project, two of the families moved from the area, and another one dropped out of the project due to numerous personal problems. I was now working with six families, but I felt that if I could maintain these six, the research project would still be valid and would answer my query: Will parental incentives increase parental involvement?

IV. ACTION

The incentive I decided upon to offer these families also required a lot of thought on my part. I wanted it to be something that they "wanted" to work for, and yet not make it so elaborate that they would have done the assignments no matter what in order to get the payoff. Throughout this entire project, I was also trying to instill in these parents the desire to continue to work with their children when there would be no extrinsic incentives. I did not think that giving a little "reward" at the end of each assignment was a good idea, because I felt that the results of my research would have been achieved in steps. I wanted to learn if these parents were committed enough to this project to wait for three months to get the incentive that was to be awarded them. That is why I chose to offer them as an incentive, a group picnic, which was to be given for those families who stayed with this research until the end. All of the chosen families liked the idea of attending a group picnic, and consented to the project after hearing about this being the incentive to complete activity-assignments with their child.

I began my project on January 16, 1999. I originally planned to give seven different parent-child activities to nine consenting families, and have my research completed by April 16, 1999. With three of those families eventually leaving the project, I was able to concentrate my

efforts on the six that remained.. Of those six, five were families whose baselines revealed little to no parental involvement. If the incentive of offering a picnic increased parental involvement in these five families, I felt that my endeavors in this research would have been worthwhile.

Each family was given an activity to be completed upon our next scheduled visit, which was usually within two weeks. When the activity was shown to me, I praised everyone involved for their work and gave them another one to be finished upon our next visit. I made these projects fairly easy and supplied the parents with all the necessary materials they would need to complete them by the following visit. And, I had to be careful to design them for each family's baseline. Those parents whose checklists and field notes revealed little to no involvement with their child were given activities that required minimal input on their part hoping to alleviate negative attitudes that might arise from an involved activity which might cause them to find reason to quit the project.

The guidelines of designing these parent-child activities to make sure they coincided with each family's baseline, enthusiasm, and functioning level were actually the main constraints of this project that I encountered.

V. RESULTS

As the research continued into February, the second month of the project, the quality of the visits with these families was on the upswing. The parents seemed anxious to show me the activities they had completed with their child. The children, too, were excited to tell me what they did in the activity, and often showed me additional projects they had done. One parent helped her daughter make five paper beaded necklaces instead of the two that I had assigned. She was so proud and delighted with the results that she wanted to make them for her friends.

Through the course of my action research, I encountered numerous positive outcomes. There were only four visit cancellations among my six remaining families, and on rescheduled visits, they wanted the activities they had missed so they could complete them for the next time. No one expressed negative attitudes about doing these parent-child activities, and only one parent questioned me as to whether we were still going to have the picnic.

At the end of this project, I had maintained the six families I had hoped would stay until the project was completed. All six of these families had completed the seven parent-child activities

I had given them, and they had all expressed pride in having done so. I was elated and on the surface, the intervention plan of offering a picnic to these parents to work with their child seemed to be a success. But looking deeper into the research made me wonder just how successful it really was.

Since my goal in doing this research was to increase parental involvement, I often found it difficult to prove that this was taking place. In one family that I was especially interested in during this project, I could not be sure that the activities were completed with the parent or with the help of the parent's sister who also lived in the house. The child, though five years old, is not verbal and could not express who helped her with the assignments.

Also, in several instances, it was difficult to detect if the parent stayed with the child during the activity, or if he simply gave the child directions and left the child to do the assignments by himself.

Nevertheless, because all seven of the parent-child activities were completed by the six families for this project, I can only assume and hope that parental involvement did increase with the help of an incentive. I believe that because these families live in isolated areas and don't venture far from their homes, they saw the picnic worth working for.

VI. REFLECTION

If I were to repeat this research project with different families, I would incorporate some changes that might support the parents confidence that they are capable of increasing their children's development at home and at school. I would have the parent begin the parent/child activity assignments during the home-visit to show me how a parent involves himself in an activity, and how well he can "direct" his child in order to increase development. I believe that I would also give the parents an opportunity or "assignment" of designing activities themselves so that they could realize how little effort it takes to help a child learn.

As I stated earlier in this paper, one of my main goals of this project was to ascertain if parental involvement occurs when there is no incentive to "work" for. A future project for action research would be to learn if the parents in this study continue to do activities with their child without the benefit of an incentive.

I found this research to be fun for the families involved and enlightening to me as a

parent-educator. I learned that parental involvement can be increased through an incentive as simple as a picnic, and I resigned myself to believe that it doesn't really matter if a Mother or her sister engages herself with a child's developmental learning so long as it takes place. I felt that my intervention was successful for this project which lasted for only three months, but the genuine incentive for increasing parental involvement in any family must come from parents who see themselves as their child's first teacher and work with them to cultivate a foundation of learning that will last a lifetime.

The time frame of this project allowed me to hold the picnic for the participating families and to include the results in my paper. The weather prevented us from being outside, so we gathered in a local church basement filled with toys and playground equipment. Five of the six final families attended and, in spite of being indoors, the atmosphere was happy and celebrating. Through observations and random conversations, I could detect a feeling of pride among the parents for having somehow "earned" the picnic. They seemed to feel special because of achievement.

Towards the end of the event I awarded each parent with a certificate of accomplishment and reminded them that this should not be the end of doing fun and educational activities with their child, but just a stepping stone to continued involvement that will enhance their child's happiness and success in school which would give cause for genuine celebration.

APPENDIX

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the Action Research Project conducted by _____this year. I understand that my identification will remain anonymous, although data may be used in the final report.

PRINT NAME_____

SIGN NAME_____

DATE_____

COMMUNITY
ACTION SOUTHWEST

Family Action Network
Life Skills Checklist

Name:_____

Date:_____

Place a check in the column next to the skills you wish to achieve during your participation in the Washington Family Action Network program. As you achieve these goals, your instructor will record the date in the right column.

A. Personal

_____	Read greeting cards	_____
_____	Write greeting cards	_____
_____	Read personal letters	_____
_____	Write personal letters	_____
_____	Read notes from school	_____
_____	Read to child	_____
_____	Help child with homework	_____
_____	Solve crossword puzzles	_____
_____	Keep a journal / diary	_____
_____	Other_____	_____

B. Food and Shopping

_____	Read menus	_____
_____	Read recipes	_____
_____	Write shopping lists	_____
_____	Write recipes	_____
_____	Read instructions / labels	_____

C. Using References

_____	Find numbers in the phone book	_____
_____	Read information in the yellow pages	_____
_____	Read newspaper / magazines	_____
_____	Other_____	_____

D. Financial

_____	Read bills	_____
_____	Open a checking account	_____
_____	Write Checks	_____
_____	Balance checkbook statement	_____
_____	Open a savings account	_____
_____	Discover investment opportunities (I.R.A., C.D., T.D.A.)	_____

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Greene County: 22 West High Street Waynesburg, PA 15370-1324 Phone (412) 852-2893 Fax (412) 627-7713

COMMUNITY
ACTION SOUTHWEST

_____	Develop a monthly budget	_____
_____	Complete loan application	_____
_____	Apply loan application	_____
_____	Apply for cash assistance	_____
_____	Other_____	_____

E. Health

_____	Read prescriptions	_____
_____	Read labels in drugstores	_____
_____	Apply for Medicare	_____
_____	Apply for Medical Assistance	_____
_____	Apply for other health insurance	_____
_____	Fill out insurance forms	_____
_____	Other_____	_____

F. Civic and Legal Activities

_____	Apply for driver's license	_____
_____	Take driver's test	_____
_____	Register to vote	_____
_____	Read ballot and vote	_____
_____	Read lease and rental contracts	_____
_____	Other_____	_____

G. Use of Library

_____	Apply for library card	_____
_____	Check out AV materials	_____
_____	Use reference materials	_____
_____	Other_____	_____

H. Community Organizations

_____	Participate in local PTA	_____
_____	Participate in scouts	_____
_____	Participate in local fireman auxiliary	_____
_____	Participate in neighborhood watch	_____
_____	Attend local township meeting	_____
_____	Attend school board meeting	_____
_____	Other_____	_____

I. Transportation

_____	Read bus / airline schedule	_____
_____	Read travel guides and maps	_____
_____	Read accident reports	_____
_____	Read car lease agreement	_____
_____	Other_____	_____

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Before Family Development Program

On the scale below, mark the box that would indicate how often you did each activity before you enrolled in Family Development. (upon enrollment and every September)

ACTIVITY	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Not very often	Not at all
I DO READING ACTIVITIES WITH MY CHILD.					
I read to my child.					
My child reads to me.					
I take my child to the Library.					
My child reads for fun.					
I VOLUNTEER IN MY CHILD"S SCHOOL.					
I volunteer in my child's classroom.					
I volunteer in my child's school Library.					
I volunteer for other school activities.					
I KNOW HOW MY CHILD DOES IN SCHOOL.					
I attend school conferences.					
I ask for meetings with teachers.					
talk to my child about school.					
I DO THINGS AT HOME THAT WILL HELP MY CHILD DO WELL IN SCHOOL					
praise and encourage my child.					
use positive methods to control my child.					
I help my child do things that will develop his /her mind and body.					
choose activities that match my child's age.					

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